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THE ANCIENT JEWISH ALLEGORISTS IN TALMUD AND MIDRASH

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(Concluded)

THE *Dorshe Ḥamurot* are to be distinguished strictly from the *Dorshe Reshumot*. Likewise allegorists, they were, however, of another kind, and they used an altogether different method, and had a different tendency from the former. Their peculiar method and tendency can be learned from a few sayings of the *Dorshe Ḥamurot* that have been preserved. It may properly be assumed a priori that the meaning of the name “Ḥamurot” must express and characterize this peculiar method and tendency. In determining the meaning of the name of the *Dorshe Ḥamurot* and the character of their interpretation, the interpretations of scriptural passages that are described in the Talmud as כּמין חמר must also be considered; they will be found of the same kind and character as the interpretations of the *Dorshe Ḥamurot*. The phrase כּמין חמר actually means “in the style or according to the method of the *Dorshe Ḥamurot*” (comp. Weiss, *Middot Soferim* on Mekilta Mishp., 83 b, and Bacher, *Terminologie*, s. v. חמר). This is satisfactorily proven by the fact that a saying in Tosefta B. Ḳ. described as being כּמין חמר is in another place ascribed to the *Dorshe Ḥamurot* (Semaḥot viii). It may, therefore, be assumed with certainty that חמר

is the singular form of חמורות, and both have, of course, the same meaning. This meaning we must establish in order to arrive at a correct definition of the name *Dorshe Hamurot* and the method it characterizes.

In trying to find the meaning of the words חמר and חמורות, we must consider only the reading with ה, *homer* and *hamurot*, which is the correct one, and leave out of account the various readings giving the form of these words as *homer* or *hamurot*, with ח, as there is no reliable authority in support of the latter.⁸⁷ As in the case of the *Dorshe Reshumot*, we must reject the definitions of the word חמר and חמורות given by some of the old commentators⁸⁸ and accepted by Bacher (*l. c.*). According to these definitions חמר, like the Aramaic חומרא or חומרתא, means "a string of pearls" or "a bunch of spices." An interpretation characterized כמין חמר is therefore as precious as pearls or as racy and delicious in taste as a cluster of aromatic spices. The *Dorshe Hamurot*, then, would be a class of interpreters whose interpretations of scriptural passages are as precious and valuable as jewels, or as pungent and fine as the pleasant fragrance of spices.

But this characterization of these ancient interpreters of the Scripture and their interpretations is vague and unsatisfactory. It is true, we find in the Talmud that a very good interpretation is figuratively called a pearl, as, for instance, in the phrase מרגלית טובה היתה בידכם ובקשתם לאברהם

⁸⁷ Bacher, *l. c.*, 62, n. 3, says that in interpreting the word חמר, one must ignore the reading with ח, although the latter is endorsed by Saadia and the Aruk, but we shall see that it is at least doubtful whether Saadia and the Aruk had the reading with ה.

⁸⁸ Rashi in *Kiddushin* 22, *s. v.* כמין חמר, says צרור המרגליות וצרור, הבושם תלוי בצואר לתכשיט. Similarly *Tosafot Soṭah* 15a, in the name of R. Hillel כמין חמר פירש ר' הלל מרגליות ענין אחר בושם.

ממני, "You had a valuable pearl [that is, a very good interpretation], and you wanted to withhold it from me" (Ḥagigah 3a; comp. also Baba Batra 123b). But one cannot call a whole class of exegetes "interpreters of pearls," because their interpretations are choice, for other interpreters may also give excellent interpretations, and goodness and excellency in general are not terms with which to characterize a whole class as distinguished from another class. Besides, as appears from some remark in the Midrash, these interpretations were not considered unexceptional by the rabbis. In Midrash Bemid. Rabba ix. 39, and in Sifre Num., sec. 8, where the saying of R. Gamaliel characterized as כמין חמר is mentioned, the words אבל נראה, "but it seems correct," or "it is plausible," follow after the words כמין חמר. If כמין חמר is meant to characterize this interpretation as exceptionally good, "precious" and valuable "as a jewel," what need is there to add that it seems to be plausible? It does not sound coherent to say: "This explanation is excellent, it is as precious as a jewel, and it appears also to be correct." The expression אבל נראה, "but it seems plausible," following the words כמין חמר, indicates rather that the interpretations of the "kind of *homer*" were not considered very good, their value and correctness were rather doubtful, so that the commendatory phrase, אבל נראה "but it is plausible, it seems correct," had to be added, to make an interpretation of the kind acceptable.

It is evident, then, that חמר expresses a peculiar characteristic of the interpretations of the *Dorshe Ḥamurot* and their method, not merely the vague description "like a pearl," or "like spices." And whatever this peculiar characteristic may be, it must be actually found in the sayings and interpretations ascribed to the *Dorshe Ḥamurot*, or described as כמין חמר. For, as said above (p. 292), any theory about

the *Dorshe Ḥamurot* must have the support of all the evidence derivable about them from all the different sources of information. Judged by this standard, all the theories about the *Dorshe Ḥamurot* advanced by modern scholars prove to be either absolutely false or, at least, unsatisfactory. Weiss' theory, that the characteristic of the *Dorshe Ḥamurot* was that they interpreted the Scriptures according to the rule or method of "measure for measure," מדה כנגד מדה (*Middot Soferim* on *Mekilta Mishp.*, 83b), does not in any way explain why the name דורשי חמורות was given to these interpreters and how the word חמר or חמורות indicates the method of "measure for measure." Besides, as will be seen from the quoted sayings of the *Dorshe Ḥamurot*, they are not at all conceived according to the rule "measure for measure." Even in those sayings described as במין חמר, which at first sight resemble interpretations according to the "measure for measure" rule, there is something peculiar to the former that distinguishes them from the latter, and in *Soṭah* 15a an interpretation according to the *homer* method, במין חמר, is in direct contrast to an interpretation according to the method "measure for measure" (see below, p. 514 f.). Kohut's³⁹ theory, that the *Dorshe Ḥamurot* were those interpreters of the Scriptures who applied the method of analogy, *Gezrah Shawwah*, is absolutely without foundation. There is not the slightest resemblance between the method used in the interpretations of the *Dorshe Ḥamurot* and the *Gezrah Shawwah* method, and not a single one of the sayings described as במין חמר can support this theory. Besides, this theory is based upon the incorrect reading חמר instead

³⁹ *Aruch Completum*, s. v. דורשי חמורות הם בעלי הדרשנים אשר: חמר: הביאו דוגמאות ע"י גזירה שוה לבאר על ידה איזה ענין מבוקש. ופי' במין חומר, בעין גזירה שוה.

We thus see that no satisfactory theory has been advanced about the *Dorshe Hamurot*, which could be substantiated both by the correct reading of the name, *Dorshe Hamurot*, and by the character of their interpretations. In attempting to give such a theory, we must, therefore, seek

כמין חמר ; אדם להבירו מאי חמר כלומר מאי מעשך ור"ת פירש חומר מעשה וכן פירש הערוך ובלשון ערבי כשאומר להבירו מה מעשך אומר לו מה חמר. Thus we see that there are as reliable authorities for the Aruk's and for Saadia's having read "*homer*" as for their having read "*homer*." Moreover, if they had had the reading *homer*, their explanation of the term, as derived from some Arabic or Aramaic word meaning "action" or "thing," would be incorrect, as neither in Aramaic nor in Arabic can there be found a word *hamr* or המרה with such a meaning. But, if we assume that they had the reading *homer*, as testified by Tosafot, their explanation would be correct. For, as we have seen, they explain מאי חמר as Aramaic for מאי טיב and מאי מעשך. The word טיב, means "essence," "nature," "real character," but also "significance," "purpose," "object," as in the expression מה טיבן, Berakot 22a; Sanhedrin 108b, and in the expression מה טיבכם in B. M. 59b (Levy, *Neuhebräisches Wörterbuch*, s. v., and *Aruch*, s. v.). The word מעשה has the meaning "fact," "essence," "object," and the phrase מאי מעשך, means "what is your action?", and also "what is your object?", or "what is the purpose of your action?" And חמר which means "significance," "importance," "essence," has also the meaning of "purpose," "object," since the purpose and object of a thing indicates its significance. In this meaning the word חמר is used in the phrase ומוסכח ליה לחומריה, "and he will reach his purpose, the object he aims at" (Abodah zarah 9a, see Levy, *Neuhebräisches Wörterbuch*, s. v.). The expression מאי חמר in Aramaic has, therefore, like מאי טיבך and מאי מעשך, the meaning, "what is the meaning and significance of your actions?", "what is your object?", "what is your purpose?". The explanation given by R. Tam, the Aruk, and Saadia, to כמין חמר, as meaning המעשה שנעשה, is therefore not, as *Eshkol* understood it, כמין המעשה שנעשה, that they interpreted a certain law according to the preceding action of the person to whom the law refers, which would be like the rule "measure for measure." It simply means that the *Dorshe Hamurot* interpreted the law according to the significance and real meaning of the action described in it or of the fact narrated in it; they explained the חמר, the object of the law and its purpose.

This definition of the *Dorshe Hamurot* is correct, and it is the same which we have given in the text.

to find the characteristic method of the *Dorshe Hamurot* as shown in their interpretations, and in the etymological meaning of the word *Hamurot*. The term חמר, often used in the Talmud as a contrast to קל, means "grave," "important," "weighty," "significant," "essential." And the same meaning attaches to the terms חמר and חמורות in the phrase כמין חמר, and in the name דורשי חמורות, as some old commentators,⁴² quoted by Saadia and the Aruk, have explained. The *Dorshe Hamurot* were, therefore, those allegoristic interpreters of the law whose method and tendency were to find the importance and significance of the law, its real meaning and purpose, since it is this, the real meaning and purpose, that gives the law weight and importance, and they considered the importance and significance of the law, its חמר, to lie, not in the plain meaning of the letter of the law, but in the spirit of the law and its allegorical meaning, which they would read into it. They are distinguished from the *Dorshe Reshumot*, who interpreted the *words* as symbols, as signs, in that they would seek to find, in the *action* enjoined by the law or in the *story* narrated, some symbolic meaning, some idea that the law wants to impress upon us, this idea being the sole purpose of the commandment or the narrative, and giving it its significance. The historical facts in themselves as narrated in the biblical story are of no significance; they must not even be taken as true; their real meaning is the idea they suggest. The actual fulfilment of the commandment, the performance of the action it prescribes, is of little or no importance. The main thing is to

⁴² *Aruk*, s. v. חמר ומפרשין להחמיר עליו: הומר. Some commentators read *homer*, and interpret it to mean the same as the verb להחמיר "to make more important," "more weighty," and "more significant."

realize the idea expressed in it, which is its true meaning and purpose.

Herein lies the fundamental difference between the interpretations of the *Dorshe Hamurot* and the interpretations according to the rule "measure for measure," מדה כנגד מדה, or similar reasons for the laws, טעמי המצות. For the latter do not in any way affect the necessity of observing the law as commanded and prescribed. They try to give a reason why the law has ordained this or that commandment, and they also assume, that, after the law, for whatever reason, has commanded us to do this or that, we must do it. The strict observance of the law and the fulfilment of the commandment is absolutely necessary and important. The *Dorshe Hamurot*, on the contrary, do not try to give a reason why a certain commandment was enjoined. They explain to what end it was given, what purpose it serves, assuming that the end and the purpose it serves, and not the commandment in itself, is the חומר, is of weight and importance. The commandment thus becoming a mere means to an end, its actual fulfilment is not so important, if the end is reached otherwise. It can be dispensed with, its allegorical meaning, which is its true significance, is realized by us.

Thus the tendency of the *Dorshe Hamurot* led to the neglecting, if not the abrogating, of the practical observance of the law, and it was this tendency that brought them into disfavor with the teachers of the traditional law, so that but few of their interpretations have been preserved; even these few were looked upon with suspicion, so that when they were mentioned, the rabbis felt the need of occasionally adding a special recommendation, in the words, אבל נראה, "but it seems probable (see above, p. 505).

We shall now quote all the sayings of the *Dorshe Hamurot*, as well as those characterized as חמר, and see if they are all in the method and of the character peculiar to the *Dorshe Hamurot*, according to the definition given above.

b. *Hullin* 134b; also *Sifre Deut.*, 165, ed. Friedmann, 106b:

דורשי חמורות⁴³ היו אומרים הזרוע כנגד היד וכן הוא אומר ויקח רמח בידו. ולחיים כנגד תפלה וכן הוא אומר ויעמד פנחם ויפלל. קיבה כמשמעה וכן הוא אומר ואת האשה אל קבתה:

The *Dorshe Hamurot* said [interpreting Deut. 18, 3], The shoulder corresponds to, or is a symbol for, the arm of a priest, as it is said of Phinehas, "and he took a javelin in his hand" (Num. 25, 7). The two cheeks correspond to, or are a symbol for, the praying of the priest, as it is said, (Ps. 106, 30), "Then stood up Phinehas and prayed" [this being their interpretation of the word ויפלל, instead of "executed judgment"]. The maw in its literal meaning of the stomach [represents the appetites], as it is said, "And the woman through her belly," (Num 25, 8). The meaning of this saying of the *Dorshe Hamurot* is not, as usually understood, that it was as a reward for the exploits of their ancestor Phinehas that the priests receive⁴⁴ these three por-

⁴³ *Sifre* has the reading דורשי רשומות instead of דורשי חמורות, but the latter is the correct reading. It is also given by the *Yalqut*. Rashi remarks here also, דורשי חמורות מקראות סתומים, those who interpret difficult passages in the Scripture, as he explains the name דורשי רשומות with whom he identifies the *Dorshe Hamurot*; see above p. 296, n. 7.—But the passage Deut. 18, 3 is in no way difficult or unclear in its meaning.

⁴⁴ For they do not say ... זכה ... בשכר, which phrase would express that they deserved or received this or that as a reward for this or that; comp. *Hullin* 88b-99a. ... בשכר שאמר אברהם אבינו ... זכו בנינו ... הזרוע כנגד היד and the term כנגד means "corresponding to," or "reminding of," and is used to express the purpose and tendency of a law (see Bacher, *Terminologic*, I, 115).

tions of the animal as their gifts. They rather wanted to explain the חֶמֶד, significance, purpose, and meaning of the three portions assigned to the priests, which, according to their interpretation, were symbols to remind the priest of his duties, duties which his ancestor, the ideal priest, Phinehas, had fulfilled, and which rest upon every priest, for he is spiritual heir to Phinehas. The shoulder is a symbol for his arm, and is to remind him that he must use the strength of his hand in the service of God, as Phinehas did. The cheek, or jaw-bone, is to remind him that he must use his mouth and his speech in the service of God, in praying [or teaching], as Phinehas did. The maw, or the stomach, is to remind him that he must suppress and fight against lower animal desires represented by the belly, as Phinehas fought against lewdness.

The main importance of the law assigning these gifts to the priest, is that the priest should remember his duties, symbolized by these gifts. The fulfilment of the law, bidding the people give these portions to the priest, is of minor importance. The same interpretation is given by Philo in his treatise, *On the Rewards of the Priests*, ch. iv. That these three portions were given to the priest, the arm being a symbol of strength and manly vigor, the jaw-bone being a symbol of uttered speech, and that which is called paunch (an excrescence of the belly), is taken as a reminder to despise all gluttony and whatever excites the appetites. Comp. also Philo, *On Drunkenness*, ch. xvii, where he says that Phinehas did not receive any physical advantages for his great exploit, but that most important and valuable of all things, the rank of priesthood, the office of serving and paying honor to God. This proves that the interpretation of the *Dorshe Hamurot*, and Philo, alike, was not to consider these gifts to the priest simply rewards for Phinehas' action,

for the typical priest received no material reward. They are symbols of the duties of the priest, which Phinehas, the ideal priest, fulfilled in an exemplary manner.

b. Pesahim 54a:

דורשי חמורות אמרו ענה פסול היה לפיכך הביא פסולין לעולם:
The *Dorshe Hamurot* said that Anah was a bastard, and therefore he brought bastard creatures into the world.

This saying of the *Dorshe Hamurot* has been preserved in a condensed or abridged form. It presupposes a knowledge of the saying in B. B. 115b, that Zibeon became the husband of his own mother and begot Anah with her, so that the latter was born in incest. The allegorist sought to extract the real meaning and significance from the passage in Gen. 36, 24, "Anah that found the mules in the wilderness, as he fed the asses of Zibeon, his father." The *Dorshe Hamurot*, who, as we shall see, were like the Alexandrian allegorists, had the same rule as Philo (comp. Siegfried, *l. c.*, 166), that when the literal meaning of a scriptural passage conveys but a trivial thought unworthy of the Scriptures, an allegorical meaning should be given to it. They thought it unworthy of the Scriptures to tell us of so trivial a thing as that Anah found mules in the wilderness. It can, therefore, not be taken in a simple sense. The Scripture must have yet another, a higher purpose, in telling the story, and the purpose is to teach us that evil begets evil, and uncleanness causes more uncleanness. Anah, himself born in incest, naturally brought mules into the world, bastard creatures, supposed to be born of an unnatural union

⁴⁵ Some manuscripts have חמורות instead of חמורות, and one has the reading חמורות, but the correct reading is חמורות. Here again Rashi says: דורשי חמורות מקראות סתומים, as in Hullin 134 (see note 38), but the passage, Gen. 36, 24, is very clear.

between two different kinds. This idea, that evil only comes from evil, is the חמר, the significance, and importance of the story.

b. Soṭah 15ab:

אמר להן ר"ג לחכמים סופרים הניחו לי ואדרשנה כמין חמר בשם שמעשיה מעשה בהמה כך קרבנה מאכל בהמה:

R. Gamaliel said to the teachers, The scribes left⁴⁶ it for me to explain [why the offering of the suspected woman, *Soṭah*, is to be of barley], in the method of the חמר, that is, like the *Dorshe Ḥamurot*, that, as her actions were the actions of a beast, so must her offering be of the food of beasts.

This saying is found also in Sifre Num. 8, ed. Friedmann, 4a, and in Num. R., xiv. 39; in both places the words כמין נראה "but it is plausible," are added to the words חמר. The meaning of this saying is not that because her actions were beastlike shall her offering be of animal food. This would be according to the method of "measure for measure." And in the Talmud this interpretation of R. Gamaliel is mentioned as directly opposed to, and contrasting with, the interpretation of R. Meir,⁴⁷ which is expressly

⁴⁶ Perhaps it is to be read הניחו לי סופרים (not ר"ג) and it means: "teachers of the law, let me [allow me to use this method rejected by you] and I will explain this law in the method of the *Homer*." This would be another proof, that this allegoristic method was objectionable to the rabbis, so that Gamaliel or Simeon b. Gamaliel had to ask leave to use it.

⁴⁷ R. Gamaliel is said to have given his interpretation after he had heard R. Meir explain, that because she [the suspected woman] had given her lover dainties, her offering should be animal food. To this explanation R. Gamaliel objected that it would only hold in case of a rich woman, but not in case of a poor woman, who could not feed her lover on dainty dishes: דשמעיה לר"מ דקאמר היא האכילתו מעדני עולם לפניך קרבנה מאכל בהמה אמר ליה התינת עשירה ענייה מאי איכא למימר אלא בשם שמעשיה מעשה בהמה כך קרבנה מאכל בהמה.

characterized as being according to the rule "measure for measure." The interpretation of R. Gamaliel is, therefore, fundamentally different from the interpretation according to the rule "measure for measure." The offering of the faithless woman is of barley, the food of animals, in order to bring it home to her, that in her conduct she was like a beast. This idea is clearly expressed by Philo, who gives the same explanation as the one described here as במין חמר. In the treatise On Special Laws Referable to the Sixth and the Seventh Commandment, ch. x, he says: "And the reason why the flour is to be made of barley is perhaps because the food which is made of barley is of a somewhat ambiguous character, and is suited to the use both of irrational animals and of needy man, and is, therefore, a sign that a woman who has committed adultery differs in no respect from the beasts, whose connections with one another are promiscuous and incessant."

The חמר, significance and real importance of this law, then, is merely to make the woman and the people realize, that adultery is the action of beasts, and, if this could be reached in another way, the actual fulfilment of the law is

We see from this passage that this R. Gamaliel was not Gamaliel II, the contemporary of R. Johanan b. Zakkai, as Hamburger (*l. c.*, 53) and, following him, Bacher, (*l. c.*, 61-63) assumed. For Gamaliel II could not have referred and objected to an interpretation by R. Meir, who lived about a hundred years later. If the reading Gamaliel here is correct, then R. Gamaliel III, the son of Judah I, is meant. Many of his sayings are found in the Mishnah, and his brother Simeon also interpreted according to the method of חמר Ḳiddushin 22b. But it is more probable that the reading ר"ג here is incorrect, and it should be רשב"ג, as Sifre has it. The two names ר"ג and רשב"ג were easily mistaken for each other. Thus, for instance, in Pesahim 88b, לכו ושאלו את ר"ג, where it should be רשב"ג (see *Dikduke Soferim, ad locum*); in many other places ר"ג occurs by mistake for רשב"ג. Simeon b. Gamaliel, however, was a contemporary of R. Meir, and he could well have heard and discussed R. Meir's interpretation.

superfluous and of no importance. Thus such interpretations lead to a possible neglect of the practical observance of the law, and the rabbis looked with suspicion upon them. For this reason it was necessary to add the words **אכל נראה** "although it is in the method of the **חמר**, yet this interpretation is plausible" (see above, p. 505).

Ḳiddushin 22b:

רבן יוחנן בן זכאי היה דורש מקרא זה כמין חמר מה נשתנה און מכל האברים שבגוף אמר הקב"ה און ששמעה קולי על הר סיני כי לי ב"י עבדים ולא עבדים לעבדים והלך זה וקנה ארון לעצמו ירצע:

R. Joḥanan b. Zakkai interpreted this verse [Exod. 21, 6, "And his master shall bore his ear through"] according to the method of the *ḥomer*. Why has the ear been distinguished from all other organs of the body to be bored through? The Holy One, blessed be He, said, The ear that heard My voice on Sinai, saying, "For unto Me the children of Israel are servants" [Lev. 25, 55, which, according to the beginning of chapter 25, was spoken on Sinai], and should not be servants to other servants, and yet went and bought a master for itself, it shall be bored through.

In the Tosefta B. Ḳ. vii. 3 this saying of Joḥanan b. Z. is found in an enlarged and modified form.⁴⁸ There

⁴⁸ In Mekilta Mishp., ed. Weiss, 83b, there is still another form of this saying, and it refers to the slave who had been sold as such for stealing: **און ששמעה על הר סיני לא תגנוב והלך וגנב היא תרצע מכל איברין**, The ear that heard on Sinai, "Thou shalt not steal," and yet went and stole [and had to be sold as a slave in consequence], shall be bored through. We can see from the many different forms in which this saying has been preserved, that the *Homer* interpretations, not being in favor with the rabbis, were not carefully transmitted in their original and correct form, yet the main idea of these interpretations is preserved in all the various forms of their sayings. It should also be noticed that this interpretation of R. Joḥanan b. Zakkai is also found in p. Ḳiddushin, but it is not characterized as being **חמר כמין** (see below p. 531).

it closes with the words: ופרק ממנו עול שמים והמליך עליו עול ,ב"ו אמר הכתוב תבא און ותרצע שלא שמרה מה ששמעה "This one has thrown off the yoke of Heaven and taken upon himself the yoke of flesh and blood. Therefore says the Scripture, Let the ear be bored through, for it did not keep and observe what it heard."

This interpretation is not, as it would appear to be at first sight, a "measure for measure" explanation—because he did not heed what he heard, therefore shall his ear be bored through. The meaning is rather this, that the חמר, the significance and importance of this law, is merely to bring home to the slave the lesson of freedom, which he has not learned, or which he has forgotten, to remind him that he did not use the sense of hearing properly, and since he did not make the right use of this sense, he need not have it, and he deserves to be deprived of it by having, not merely the upper or lower part of his external ear bored through, as the traditional law requires (see *Ḳiddushin* 21*b*, and *Bekorot* 37 *ab*), but rather the tympanic membrane, so that no sound may be transmitted to him. Of course, as the whole ceremony has merely a symbolical significance, חמר, and its purpose is mainly to show that the slave did not listen to the word of God, it must not be actually observed, if the same idea is brought home to him by other means. Thus the practical observance of this law is of little importance, and may be neglected. Philo, in his treatise *On Cain and His Birth*, ch. xxii, gives the same interpretation of *Exod.* 21, 6. "For if the servant shall answer and say, I shall not depart and be free, he shall surely have what he asked, having first had his ear bored through, that he may not hear the words of God about freedom of soul." Although Philo explains the

whole law allegorically, as referring to the slave of passions, yet the interpretation of the act of perforating the ear is the same as that given by the *homer* method in regard to the real slave.

Kiddushin 22b:

ר' שמעון ברבי היה דורש את המקרא הזה כמין חמר מה נשתנו דלת ומוזזה מכל כלים שבבית אמר הקב"ה דלת ומוזזה שהיו עדים במצרים בשעה שפסחתי על המשקוף ועל שתי המוזזות ואמרתי כי לי ב"י עבדים ולא עבדים לעבדים והוצאתים מעבדות לחרות והלך זה וקנה ארון לעצמו ירצע בפניהם:

R. Simeon, the son of Rabbi (Judah I), interpreted this passage [Exod. 21, 6, "His master shall bring him to the door or unto the door-post"] according to the method of *homer*. To what purpose have the door and door-post been distinguished from all the other fixtures and furniture of the house? The Holy One, blessed be He, said, The door and the door-post were witnesses in Egypt, at the time when I passed over the lintel and the two side-posts [of the Jewish house, see Exod. 12, 23], and I said, The children of Israel shall be My servants and not servants unto servants, and I brought them forth from slavery unto freedom. Yet this one went and bought himself a master, [his ears] shall therefore be bored through in the presence of these [witnesses].

Here, again, the significance and the purpose of the law, that the slave whose ear is to be bored through be brought near the door, is declared to be symbolic, since door and door-post, having played a rôle in the deliverance of Israel and in the principles of freedom taught at that time, are well suited to be reminders to him of the lesson of freedom which he has forgotten, and to help to impress upon his mind that he was wrong in choosing to be a slave. As

the whole law has but a symbolic significance, its actual observance becomes superfluous, if the idea it is to suggest can be impressed upon the mind by other means, as, for instance, by mere words expressing these ideas. Thus the practical observance of the law may be altogether neglected.

In Semaḥot viii, the following four sayings are mentioned in the name of the *Dorshe Hamurot*:

דורשי חמורות ואומרים: ונתצתם את מזבחותם מה חטאו עצים ואבנים
אלא לפי שבאה לאדם תקלה על ידיהם אמר הכתוב ונתצתם והרי
דברים ק"ו ומה אם עצים ואבנים שאין בהם לא זכות ולא חובה לא
טובה ולא רעה על שבאה תקלה על ידיהם לאדם אמרה תורה ונתצתם.
אדם שהוא גורם להחטיא את חבירו ומטהו מדרך חיים לדרך מות
על אחת כמה וכמה. והרגת את האשה ואת הבהמה. אם אדם חטא
בהמה מה חטאה אלא לפי שבאה לאדם רעה על ידה שלא תהא בהמה
עוברת בשוק ואומרים זו בהמה שנסקל פלוני על ידה והרי דברים ק"ו
ומה אם בהמה שאין בה לא זכות ולא חובה ולא טובה ולא רעה על
שבאה לאדם תקלה על ידה אמרה התורה תסקל האדם שהוא גורם
להחטיא את חבירו ומטהו מדרך חיים לדרך מות על אחת כמה וכמה.
וכן הוא אומר באבני המזבח לא תניף עליהם ברזל ובמקום אחר הוא
אומר כי חרבך הנפת עליה ותחללה מה נשתנה ברזל להיות פסול למזבח
מכל מיני מתכות לפי שחרב סימן קללה ומזבח סימן כפרה ומעבדין
סימן קללה בשביל דבר כפרה. והרי דברים ק"ו ומה מזבח אבנים
שאינן לא רואות ולא מדברות ולא אוכלות ולא שותות על שמטילות
שלום בין ישראל לאביהם שבשמים אמרה תורה לא תניף עליהם ברזל
בני תורה שהם כפרה לעולם על אחת כמה וכמה וכן הוא אומר אבנים
שלימות תבנה את מזבח ד' אלקיך אבנים שמטילות שלום בעולם והרי
דברים ק"ו ומה אבנים שאינן לא רואות ולא שומעות ולא מדברות ולא
אוכלות ולא שותות על שמטילות שלום בין ישראל לאביהם שבשמים
יהיו שלמים לפני הק"ב. בני תורה שהם כפרה לעולם על אחת כמה
וכמה יהיו שלימים לפני הקב"ה:

The *Dorshe Hamurot* said (regarding the passage Deut. 12, 3), "And ye shall overthrow their altars." How have the

wood and the stones sinned that they should be destroyed? It is merely because some mishap came to man through them that the Scripture orders them to be destroyed. Now, if the law orders that pieces of wood and stones, which can possess neither merit nor guilt, neither goodness nor evil, only because they have caused some moral harm to man, should be destroyed, then, how much more is a man to be punished who causes his fellow-man to sin, and leads him away from the path of life unto the path of death?

The same interpretation the *Dorshe Hamurot* gave to the passage in Lev. 20, 16: "Thou shalt kill the woman and the beast." If the woman has sinned, how has the beast sinned? But because some mishap came to a human being through it, etc.

Here, again, the *Dorshe Hamurot* seek to explain the חמר, significance and real purpose of the law. They reject the idea, accepted by the traditional law, that ע"ז מטמא, idols and all connected with them, are in themselves defiling, and should be destroyed, for מה חטאו עצים ואבנים, Of what offense can stones and wood be found guilty, and why should they be condemned? The purpose and significance of the law is, therefore, merely to impress the idea upon us, that everything that helps in some way to cause moral evil to man, should be destroyed, that man may not be harmed by it, that he forget the evil, not being reminded of it by its accessories, and never repeat it, and that we should learn the lesson to remove from our midst such beings as try to mislead others and cause them to sin. Of course, once we know the meaning of the law and realize its idea, it is not necessary actually to destroy the altars of the idols, for there is no defilement or uncleanness inherent in the implements of idolatry as the traditional law assumes.

The same meaning and purpose they found in the law of Lev. 20, 16, which, according to them, does not actually bid us kill the beast, but merely suggests that we should remove from our midst anything that may remind man of a moral evil, lest, being reminded of the evil, man repeat it.

The third and fourth sayings about the altar stones, which are cited here in the name of the *Dorshe Hamurot*, are mentioned, in the Tosefta B. K. vii, among the five sayings of R. Johanan b. Zakkai conceived in the method of the *homer*, כמין חמר, which we shall now quote and discuss one by one.

חמשה דברים היה רבן יוחנן בן זכאי אומר כמין חמר

The following five sayings R. Johanan b. Zakkai has uttered in the *homer* method:

מפני מה גלו ישראל לבבל יותר מכל הארצות כולן מפני שבית אברהם אביהם היה משם משלו משל למה"ר לאשה שקלקלה על בעלה להיכן משלחה לבית אביה:

1. Why was Israel exiled to Babylon, and not to any other country? Because their father Abraham's house originated in Babylon. It is as when a woman becomes faithless to her husband—he sends her back to her father's house. The significance of the exile to Babylon was to make the people realize that they committed a wrong in becoming faithless to God, that they acted like a faithless woman, and for this reason their fate has been that of a faithless woman, namely, to be sent back to her father's house.

בלוחות הראשונות הוא אומר והלוחות מעשה אלקים חמה ובשניות מעשה משה והמכתב מכתב אלקים הוא משלו משל למה"ר למלך ב"ו שקדש את האשה הוא מביא את הבלר ואת הקולמוס ואת הדיו ואת השטר ואת העדים. קלקלה היא מביאה את הכל דייה שיתן לה המלך כתב היכר יד שלו:

2. Of the first tables it is said, "And the tables were the work of God" (Exod. 32, 16), while the second tables were the work of Moses, and only the writing was God's (Exod. 34, 1). It is like a King who betroths a wife. He furnishes the scribe, the pen, the ink, the paper, and the witnesses [for the marriage contract]. But if she becomes faithless to him, and later they renew the marriage contract, she has to furnish all that is necessary for it, it is enough if the King gives his signature.—The purpose of having the second tables made by Moses was to demonstrate to the people how wrong they had been in making the golden calf, and thus becoming faithless to God, and they did not deserve that God should give them the second tables, it is enough if He writes His writing upon them. This is the significance of the passage Exod. 36, 1.

3. "And his master"....

The same as in *Kiddushin 22b*; see above, p. 516.

ואומר מזבח אבנים לא תניף עליהם ברזל וכי מה ראה הכתוב לפסול את הברזל יותר מכל מיני מתכות מפני שהחרב נעשה ממנו והחרב סימן פורענות והמזבח סימן כפרה. והלא דברים ק"ו ומה אבנים שאינן לא רואות ולא שומעות ולא מדברות על שמטילות כפרה בין ישראל לאביהם שבשמים אמר הכתוב לא תניף עליהם ברזל בני תורה שהם כפרה לעולם על אחת כמה וכמה שלא ליגע בהן אחד מכל המזיקין כולן:

4. It is said (Deut. 27, 5), "Altar of stones, thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them." Why has the law forbidden the use of tools of iron and not those of any other metal? Because the sword is made of iron, and the sword is the symbol of punishment and revenge, while the altar is a symbol of forgiveness and conciliation. The symbol of punishment should be kept away from the symbol of for-

giveness. Now stones cannot see nor hear nor speak, yet because they bring about conciliation between the people of Israel and their Father in Heaven, the law forbids us to lift up an iron tool upon them. How much less should anything harmful be allowed to come to the students of the law, who bring forgiveness to the world.—The significance and the purpose of the law are to suggest to us to keep away whatever may cause injury from that which stands for reconciliation; and our ideal of forgiveness, of which the altar is a symbol, should be free from ideas of punishment and revenge. We should seek not to hurt those who bring us forgiveness. These ideas are the real meaning of the law, the actual fulfilment of the law; not to lift an iron tool upon the altar is of little or no importance, and may be neglected, if once we know what the true intent of the prohibition is.

הרי הוא אומר אבנים שלימות תבנה את מזבח ד' אלקיך אבנים שמטילות שלום. והלא דברים ק"ו ומה אם אבנים שאינו לא רואות ולא שומעות ולא מדברות על שמטילות שלום בין ישראל לאביהם שבשמים אומר המקום יהיו שלמים לפני בני תורה שהן שלום בעולם על אחת כמה וכמה שיהיו שלמים לפני המקום:

5.⁴⁹ It is said, "Thou shalt build the altar of the Lord thy

⁴⁹ It is evident that 4 and 5 are two different sayings. Each interprets a different passage, containing a special law. The one (4) interprets the passage Deut. 27, 5, which forbids the use of an iron tool in building the altar, even if it be built of whole stones. The other (5) interprets the passage Deut. 27, 6, which commands that the stones of which the altar is built, be whole, not broken, and not cut by any tool, even if not of iron. These two sayings have been contracted into one (comp. Sifra Kedoshim, ed. Weiss, 92d, where they appear as but one saying). It seems that in the Tosefta they have been taken as one saying, and to fill out the number five, the saying of R. Joh. b. Zakkai interpreting the passage Lev. 4, 22, has been inserted. But this interpretation does not belong to this class, it is not in the *homer* method. The number, five, mentioned in the beginning, is completed, if we distinguish between the interpretation of Deut. 27, 5 and 6, and count them as two sayings, as, indeed, they are.

God of whole stones" (Deut. 27, 6). That means stones that bring about peace. Now stones do not see nor hear nor talk, yet, because they bring about peace and reconciliation between the people of Israel and their Father in Heaven, God wants them to be whole. As the students of the law stand for peace in the world, how much more is it necessary that they be whole and perfect before God?

The חמר, significance and purpose, of this law, is merely to symbolize the perfect agreement and harmony between Israel and God, and to suggest that those who seek to establish peace and harmony in the world must be of a whole, and perfect, and harmonious character, as the altar stones, the symbols of peace, are whole, not broken and not cut. But if once we realize the ideas which the law wants to impress upon us, it is of very little importance whether the stones of the altar be really whole or not. The important thing is not the practical observance of the law, but the understanding of what it means to teach us.

From all these sayings of the *Dorshe Hamurot* and those characterized as במין חמר, we can see that the name *Dorshe Hamurot*, which, according to our definition, means "interpreters of the importance and significance of the law," was justly given to these ancient allegorists. It expresses adequately their peculiar method and tendency, to seek the important element of a law or a story and to explain its significance and purpose. This peculiar characteristic is found in every one of their sayings that have been transmitted to us, and in those sayings which are characterized as being like them, במין חמר. We have also found that they did not ascribe any real importance to the plain meaning of the law or to a story. They sought to find some idea or truth suggested or expressed in the law or the narrative of the Scripture, and this underlying idea or truth was, according

to them, the main purpose for which the law was commanded, or the story was told. They alone could give significance and importance to the law or the story.

This method did not originate in Palestine. It was not, like the method of the *Dorshe Reshumot*, a Jewish product, the necessary result and outgrowth of a Jewish religious principle. To the Palestinian Jew the main significance of the laws lay in the fact that they were Divine commandments, and, as such, they were important, even if they did not suggest any philosophical idea, and even if human understanding could not grasp their meaning and find their purpose. The tendency to seek some philosophical idea or truth, which, if contained in and expressed by the law, would give the latter importance and significance, originated among the Alexandrian Jews, who were influenced by Greek thought. And the method they employed in reading philosophical ideas into the law, was also an imitation of the Greek method of interpretation. As the Greek sought, by means of allegoristic interpretations, to find all wisdom in Homer, so the Greek Jews sought to find all wisdom contained or indicated in their law, and their method was an allegoristic interpretation, which made the laws and narratives of the Scriptures express or suggest some recondite ideas and philosophical truths (comp. Siegfried, *l. c.*, p. 25).

In the *Dorshe Hamurot*, therefore, we recognize the Alexandrian⁵⁰ allegorists or some of their Palestinian fol-

⁵⁰ The origin of the Hellenic allegorist method, which served as a model to the Alexandrian allegorists, was the interpretation of the narratives and myths of Homer (comp. Siegfried, *l. c.*, 16). If, therefore, the reading *חמור* instead of *חומר* has any foundation, and is not merely a misprint for *חומר*, then it would designate the method of the Alexandrian allegorists by referring it to its origin and to the model they followed. The phrase *חמור כמין חומר* would, therefore, mean simply: Interpret the Scripture as if it were Homer, or in the same way as Homer is interpreted. But we have found that the correct reading is *חומר*.

lowers. Accordingly, it appears that the two ancient classes or schools of allegorists, the Alexandrian and the Palestinian, are both mentioned in the talmudic-midrashic literature, the former under the name *Dorshe Ḥamurot*, the latter under the name *Dorshe Reshumot*. We have seen that to the sayings of the *Dorshe Reshumot*, as well as those of the *Dorshe Ḥamurot*, there are parallels in the interpretations of Philo, which is not at all strange, since Philo was influenced by both the Palestinian and the Alexandrian allegoristic methods (see above, p. 328, and Schürer, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, III,⁴ p. 701 ff.), and his rules were a combination of the rules of Palestinian teachers and the hermeneutic rules of the Stoic philosophers (comp. Siegfried, 165). From the fact that the Alexandrian allegoristic method, חמר, and they that used it, דורשי חמורות, are mentioned in the Talmud and the Midrashim, we can see that just as the Jewish or Palestinian method found its way to Alexandria, and was applied by Philo, so the Hellenic or Alexandrian method found its way to the Palestinian schools, and was occasionally, though only reluctantly, applied by the Palestinian teachers of the law. The latter method, however, carried with it grave dangers for Judaism, for, as we have seen, it tends to make the actual fulfilment of the law and the practical observance of religious ceremonies superfluous and unnecessary, since the purpose of the laws and commandments is merely to suggest ideas and teach philosophical truths. Even in Alexandria, where it originated, some objected to it, seeing in it a danger to Judaism (comp. Philo, *De somnis*, I, 16-17). The danger was real, for some Jews did, indeed, draw the feared conclusion from the allegoristic interpretations of the law, and went to the extreme of neglecting altogether the practical observance of Jewish religious laws and ceremonies. And they con-

tented themselves with the understanding of the ideas suggested or expressed by these laws or ceremonies (comp. Philo, *De Migratione Abrahami*, 16). In Palestine, where this method was a foreign product, the objections to it were much stronger. We have seen (above p. 329 ff.), that because of its abuse, the Palestinian teachers objected even to their own allegoristic method, the method of רשומות. But their opposition to the Alexandrian method, which was not of Jewish origin, was much stronger, especially when the Christians made use of it to show the irrelevance of the practical observance of the law. We find some utterances of the teachers of the traditional law that express the strongest condemnation of the manner in which some people habitually use this allegoristic method in their interpretation of the Scripture. Thus the "slandorous interpretations," הנדרות של דופי, ascribed to Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, which the rabbis condemn (in Sanhedrin 99b, and Sifre Num. 112, ed. Friedman, 33a), were such allegoristic interpretations, given by some heretic of their own times, whom they considered on a level with the wicked King Manasseh. The interpretations themselves are not given to us; the rabbis apparently did not care even to repeat them. For it is evident that the questions:

וכי לא היה לו למשה לכתוב אלא ואחות לוטן תמנע. ותמנע היתה פלגש לאליפו וילך ראובן בימי קציר חטים וימצא דוראים בשדה: do not constitute interpretations, הנדרות. These questions are merely introductory remarks to interpretations given to the passages, Gen. 30, 14; 36, 22. 12, showing how absurd it would be to take these passages in their simple, literal meaning, to think that Moses did not have anything better to write in the Torah than such trivial stories. These stories are, therefore, not to be taken literally; they

are to be interpreted in an allegorical way, to demonstrate that they contain some higher ideas, which make them worthy of having been written by Moses in the law, as the *Dorshe Hamurot* invested the story of Anah and the mules with a recondite truth, for the reason that the literal meaning of the story is too trivial to have been recorded in the law unless it conveyed another meaning. Such interpretations the rabbis considered slanderous, since they imply that the stories of the Scriptures, in their literal meanings, are not true and not worthy of being told and recorded. In *Sifre*, *l. c.*, these interpretations are repudiated with the remark: כסבור אתה שמה בדרכי, בשר ודם דרכי המקום: You think the Divine ways are like human ways. You assume to judge the Divine law by your human standards, and dare judge what is or what is not worthy of having been recorded in God's law.

Another protest against the allegoristic interpretations in the method of the *Dorshe Hamurot* is contained in the following passage of the Mishnah Berakot (v. 3):

האומר על קן צפור רחמיה משתקין אותו:

Whoever says, "To the birds' nest extend Thy mercy," is to be silenced. The exact meaning of this Mishnah passage was not known to the Amoraim; they merely tried to guess at it. But the various explanations given by them are not satisfactory. In the Palestinian Talmud two explanations are given, one by R. Phinehas is that it sounds like a complaint against God, as if one were to say: Thy mercies reach to the birds' nest, but to man they do not reach, for Thou allowest man to suffer:

כקורא תגר על מדותיו של הקב"ה על קן צפור הגיעו רחמיה ועל אותו האיש לא הגיעו:

The other explanation, by R. Simeon, is, that it sounds

as if the Divine mercy were limited to the birds' nest alone:

בנותן קיצבה למדותיו של הקב"ה עד קן צפור הגיעו רחמיו:

In b. Berakot 33, two other explanations are given:

חד אמר מפני שמטיל קנאה במעשה בראשית וחד אמר מפני שעושה מדותיו של הקב"ה רחמים ואינן אלא גזירות:

One says, It is forbidden because in saying so, we create jealousy among the created beings, as if God had mercy only upon the birds, and not upon His other creatures. The other says, Such a saying as the Mishnah forbids, declares the rules and laws of God as mercy or love, while they are decrees. The fact is that the Mishnah did not mean to forbid a man to appeal in his prayers to the Divine mercy, by referring to the law of Deut. 22, 6, as an expression of His love for His creatures, and there is no harm in seeing in the laws of God merely expressions of love. And when a rabbi once uttered the prayer: "Thou hast shown mercy to the birds' nest, show Thy mercy and Thy compassion to us also": *אתה חסד על קן צפור*, he gained the admiration of Rabbah, who expressed himself thus: *כמה ידע האי מרבנן לרצוי למאריה*: "How well this rabbi knows how to plead with his Master." These words were said in all sincerity, not merely to sharpen Abaye's wits (*לחרורי לאביי*) and to rouse his protest against this prayer, as explained in Talmud Berakot 33a. The Mishnah here refers to the people who deny that God meant us to fulfil the law of Deut. 22, 6, in declaring it to be beneath God to extend His mercies to such insignificant creatures as birds in a nest. We can find similar interpretations by Philo and by Paul. Philo (*De somnis*, I, 16) explains the law in Exod. 22, 26, in an allegorical way. He says, It cannot mean a real

garment, as God would not concern himself about a garment, and would not think of prescribing a law for it. And Paul, in I Corinthians 9, 9-10, in explaining the law (in Deut. 25, 4), says: It is written in the law of Moses, "Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn." Doth God take care of the oxen? or doth He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written.

He therefore explains the law to mean that the teachers of religion be supported and provided for, for it would be unworthy of God to concern himself with oxen and take care of them. To such allegoristic interpretations of the law the Mishnah refers in the saying *האומר על קן צפור יגיעו רחמיך* Whosoever says: "Do God's mercies extend to the birds' nest? Can God concern Himself with such trivial things?" is to be silenced. We should not listen to such interpretations of the law, which deny the necessity of fulfilling it and observing it practically.

This resentment against the allegoristic method grew greater in Palestine, where there were frequent disputes with the Jewish Christians, who used such allegoristic interpretations of the Scripture in their arguments for the superiority of their new religion. The later Palestinian teachers rejected its use, and tried to suppress it. They could not reject the method of the *Dorshe Reshumot* altogether, since the latter was a purely Jewish product. They therefore merely restricted its use, but the Alexandrian method, the method of the *Dorshe Hamurot*, being a foreign product, could be rejected wholly. This explains the fact that in the Palestinian Talmud not one saying of the *Dorshe Hamurot* is mentioned; not even those sayings characterized as *במין חמר* are found in the Palestinian Talmud, with the ex-

ception of the saying of R. Johanan B. Zakkai (Kid-dushin 22*b*) which, however, is mentioned in the parallel passage in the Palestinian Talmud, without being characterized as כמין חמר (see above, note 48). In Babylonia, however, where they had no religious disputes with Jewish Christians, and, therefore, did not have occasion so often to note the dangerous side of the allegoristic method, they did not object so strongly to the allegorists, not even to the *Dorshe Ḥamurot*. It is due to this fact that the few sayings of the *Dorshe Ḥamurot* and those belonging in the same category with them, כמין חמר, have been preserved to posterity.